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HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE NORTH CENTRAL STATES¹

FOR the discomforts, temporary or permanent, of a frontier life, immigrants in the settlement of a new territory are accustomed to compensate themselves with the prospect of improving their financial and social condition and the hope of elevating the condition and prospects of their children. In this hope the very first of their impulses is to make liberal provisions for education. It was doubtless the knowledge of this fact that led the framers of the "Ordinance of 1787" to declare, in memorable words, that "Schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged." It was the same impulse that led Congress almost immediately afterwards to appropriate lands, not only for the support of common schools, but also for the support of universities. This impulse has also been the cause of the interesting fact that from that day to this, no state has been admitted to the union without congressional provision for support of schools of all grades from the lowest to the highest.

The consequence of these impulses and provisions has been that not even the material development of the middle West has been more striking than the provisions that have everywhere been made for schools and the other means of education. Attention has often been called to the fact that wherever a village arises, either on the prairie, or in the valley, or on a hillside, the most conspicuous building is likely to be the high school, to which the people point with satisfaction as evidence of their interest in this great and all absorbing necessity. To these temples of learning and pride all the paths from the lower schools converge, and from them go out ways to the various colleges, universities, and professional schools.

These conditions have borne fruits that may well cause a pardonable satisfaction in the minds and hearts of those who have established their homes in this region. The figures showing the progress that has been made can hardly be contemplated without pleasure. The people of other parts of the country are apt to think of the middle West as a

¹ An address delivered at the meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Preparatory Schools, held in Chicago, February 12, 1897.

region that must be taken into account or tolerated because of its commercial and political importance, not to say predominance, but they are not accustomed to think of it as one of exceptional educational enterprise and achievement. If they take the trouble to look at the figures, they see that while the North Atlantic division of the country, embracing New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, showed a population in 1890 of somewhat more than 17 millions, the population of the north central states at the same time was more than 22 millions. If they venture to pursue their inquiries further, they see that the inhabitants of this region are at the present time just about equal in number to the present inhabitants of all of the original thirteen states, and they are obliged to admit that it is not altogether singular, when a new presidential election takes place, that everybody looks to the middle West as the storm center of the contest, and that the new president, in recognition of this fact, naturally draws his cabinet very largely from the region of such preëminent importance and power.

But while these facts lie very near the surface and are open to the contemplation of every thinking man, it is not quite so easy to understand the importance, I may say the largeness, of the means that have been provided for education. Still less is there an adequate popular knowledge of what is going on in the development of high schools, colleges and universities.

Although not unmindful of Dr. Johnson's dictum that "figures are nonconductors of thought," we are obliged, however reluctantly, to admit that statistics are the only means by which we may come to an adequate understanding of the educational conditions of the middle West as compared with the East. Inspecting the table prepared by the statistician of the Educational Bureau at Washington, published in *The World's Almanac* for 1897, we find some remarkable disclosures. They doubtless contain errors, but we may perhaps safely suppose the mistakes in regard to one region will very nearly balance those of the other. We find that in the state universities alone of the north central states there are in attendance, the present year, 15,212 students; nearly a thousand more than the 14,258 in all the colleges and universities of New England. In the north central states there are also catalogued 192 colleges, universities and other professional schools, not under state control or supervision, and in these institutions the number of students is not less than 50,132. Adding these numbers

together, we find that the number of students, the present year, in colleges and universities of the north central group of states is 65,344, as compared with the 33,651 in the colleges, universities and professional schools of the North Atlantic division. In the South Atlantic states the number is 14,328. If we unite these with the North Atlantic we have in all the Atlantic states an aggregate of 47,989, or 17,355 less than the number in the north central states alone.

It is not so easy to bring together statistics in regard to the preparatory schools. For the purpose of securing such information, a note of inquiry was addressed to all the Superintendents of Public Instruction in the East, and in the north central states; but the answers to these inquiries have been incomplete. In some cases immediate and satisfactory replies were sent; in others, reference was made to tables of statistics, which confessedly do not furnish answers to the questions asked. In these inquiries, a desire was expressed to ascertain (1) the number of high schools having a four years' course in each of the states; (2) the number of pupils in these high schools; and (3) the number who last year completed such courses. As replies have not been received from all the states interrogated, I am obliged to limit my comparisons to the answers that have come to hand. In Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska the number of four-year high schools last year was 541. The number of pupils in those schools was 68,826. The number who completed the course, or graduated, to use a popular term, was 8951. I have been unable to ascertain how large a number of these pupils went to college, but in the state of Wisconsin, which I assume is not exceptional, of the 1477 who graduated 49 per cent., or 723, went to higher institutions of one grade or another.

These figures, interesting and even momentous in themselves as they are, take no account of what may be called the private interest that has been taken in the great educational movement. The private colleges and universities, called into existence and supported by impulses either denominational, or undenominational, add immensely to the significance of this great movement. The simple fact that within five years 11.5 million dollars have been given for the beginning of The University of Chicago, is unquestionably one of the most momentous facts in the modern history of education. Then, too, there is the great library movement, which in many of the states promises to put very considerable collections of books within the reach of every young man and woman. The Newberry Library, the Crerar Library, and

Public Library, the Marshall Field Museum, and the Art Institute in Chicago, are but magnificent tributes to this same great educational impulse. Milwaukee is now completing a public library building at a cost of half a million; and the state legislature of Wisconsin two years ago provided for the erection on the state university grounds of a state historical library building, to cost about \$400,000, and at the same session the legislature also provided for the establishment of public libraries throughout the state, which should be tributary to the influence and the power of the 146 high schools already named. Similar movements are taking place in other states.

Mention should also be made of another interesting movement. The Lewis Institute, whose gracious hospitality we are here so glad to accept, the new institute at Peoria, and the Morgan Park Academy, are all to be modeled on a six-year basis for the purpose of preparing students to enter the junior year of our best colleges and universities. This purpose is apparently the beginning of a series of schools analogous to the German *gymnasia* and *realschulen*.

These, it may well be said, are only the material side of what has been done for secondary and higher education. It will be unfair in the discussion not to inquire whether these material provisions have completely satisfied the requirements of the situation. No one at all acquainted with the facts will for a moment claim that such a question can be answered in the affirmative. The period of juvenility is always subject to juvenile diseases, but so long as the perils of teething, and whooping cough, and diphtheria, and scarlet fever continue to be no reason for abandoning humanity as a failure, so it may fairly be said that the mistakes and the inefficiency incident to the organization of educational institutions and methods are no reason for despair, or even condemnation. On the contrary, it is manifestly our duty to look the limitations and shortcomings of the situation fairly in the face, and do what we can to remove the weaknesses and improve the character of the work done.

The most dangerous, if not the most conspicuous of the weaknesses in the situation is undoubtedly a more or less prevalent satisfaction with the material provisions that have been made for the different grades of schools. We are constantly forgetting that the value of excellent school buildings and of perfect organization consists exclusively in their adaptability to bring the well-qualified and inspiring teacher into contact with the willing and enterprising pupil. When we remember that school buildings, however magnificent, and that

courses of instruction, however carefully arranged, never did, and never can educate anybody, we shall see that but a part of the work is done when all that has been named has been successfully completed. The world is full of examples to show that it is the living and inspiring teacher, thoroughly equipped for his work, and brought into immediate contact with the willing pupil, that is the great and all-important element in successful education. The world has recently been wondering how it is that the little country of Scotland, not so large or so wealthy as some of the states here represented, should have been able during the last century to make such a prodigious impression upon the world of philosophy, of science, of politics, and of letters. The secret is not in its magnificent schoolhouses, or in its carefully organized school system; it is rather in the enthusiastic and discriminating public sentiment of the land. It is that public opinion which provides its Domsie, who is everywhere looking out for the "Lad o' Pairts;" the schoolmaster who delights and enthusiastically rejoices in the flavor of Ciceronian Latin, or in the uncontrollable enthusiasm for beetles, and whose proudest boast, like that of the Domsie of Drumtochty, is the fact that in forty years there has never been a time when his school has not had a lad high in the ranks of one of the universities. It is the spirit like that which Barrie describes when he says that at Thrums, of all the days of the year, the most important and the most exciting was the one when the half dozen boys went up to the university for their competitive examination with all the rest of Scotland for the bursaries and the scholarships. It was that which Margaret Ogilvie showed when she first looked upon her infant in the cradle and pronounced him a candidate for college. It was that which so excited the whole village when the "News from a Far Country" brought back the glad word that Drumtochty still had a professor. This is the spirit which, with all the poverty of the land, has given to the world the Carlyles, and the Ruskins, and the Gladstones, and the Thompsons, and the Drummonds, and the Stephensons, and the MacLarens, and the Barries. Such men have been the fruits, not of any system of schoolhouses, or of organization, but of that spirit on the part of the people which finds its magnificent expression in the saying of John Knox, fit to be inscribed above the doors of every university, that "Ilka scholar is something added to the riches of the commonwealth."

Another danger in the situation is in the false conception, more or less prevalent, in regard to what are called "practical studies." I am

of the opinion that of all the delusions that have found lodgment in the popular mind within the past half century concerning education this one has been the most harmful. The notion is more or less prevalent that in some way or another a boy or girl can learn in school those things which will best fit them for the affairs of life. The fallacy of this supposition shows itself when we remember the extraordinary facility with which we all forget the major part of that which we learn in the processes of education. If any one of us here were to take an inventory of the remaining portions of the intellectual outfit which he brought from school, and even from college, he would probably be surprised at the meagerness of the result. We may remember indeed those lessons learned which have had a direct bearing upon our subsequent professional pursuits, but, after we make due allowance for such eliminations, we shall find the result exceeding small.

Nor is it true that the child knows what particular items of information he will have occasion to use in after life. Careful analysis pursued along these lines is likely to bring us to the conclusion that, after all, the great business of education is not the furnishing of information, but the development of the mind; the giving to the intelligence, to the perceptions, to the will, and to the judgment, such ability as will enable them to grapple successfully with any of the affairs with which in subsequent life they may have to deal. It is certainly as true as it is trite to say that it is not what the student knows, but what the student can do with any question set before him, that determines whether he is well, or ill, qualified for the work with which he will have to deal. It follows, therefore, that the great business of education, at least until the student gets well on in his college course, is to furnish the means of a well-balanced development of all the intellectual, physical, and moral powers of the student. To ascertain how these ends can best be reached is, I conceive, the most fruitful business of this association.

Another error is in the popular supposition that political salvation is to come from the common schools. God forbid that we should underestimate the importance of broad and strong foundations. Such foundations undoubtedly are the primary schools, and it is quite possible that in our care and anxiety and haste to complete the superstructure we have not been sufficiently watchful of what is going on at the bottom. I am inclined to think that not simply in the West, but everywhere in the country, the primary schools are the weakest part of our educational system. We have good instruction in the high schools,

but throughout the country there is a crying need of better organization and better instruction in the lower grades of educational work. Until the American boy of twelve or fifteen is as well trained as the German boy of the same age, we have no reason to rest satisfied.

But, however we may recognize the need of improvement in the foundations, we must never forget that the foundations are not the edifice. No nation ever was, or ever can be, safely or wisely directed by elementary education. There are two educational needs in this country of consummate importance. The first is the most general and the most thorough possible training of those who by their elevated professional positions are to be, and must be, the guides and leaders of public opinion; and the other is the great truth that the very highest service that the common schools can render is to teach the masses of the people how to recognize and how to choose and how to follow those who by a wise and comprehensive education have been fitted for leadership. Let us ever keep in mind the fact that this country was not founded and our institutions were not organized by the skill that comes from the common schools. It was great learning and great wisdom and great character that gave us the constitution and the marvelous organization of that government of which we are so justly proud. It is only by the same means that these benign institutions are to be perpetuated and strengthened; and it is because of this fact that whatever other necessities temporarily confront us, every grade of education from the lowest up to the highest must have the constant and unwearying support and encouragement of all the forces of the state and the nation.

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